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THE INDYPENDENT

A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Issue #87 May 10 - June 7, 2006

Eviction!

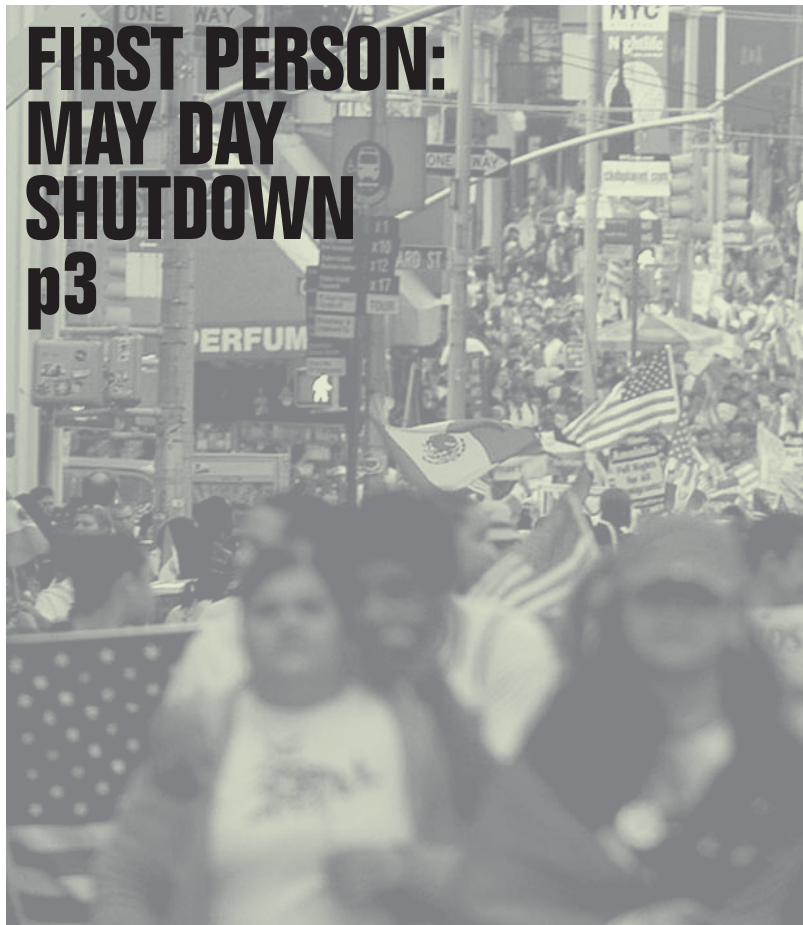
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INDYPENDENT.ORG



NEW YORK CITY INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

E-mail imc-nyc-print@lists.indymedia.org

Phone (212) 221-0521

indypendent.org
nyc.indymedia.org
us.indymedia.org
GLOBAL: indymedia.org

Office

NYC Independent Media Center
4 West 43rd St - Suite 311
NY, NY 10035

WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Independent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Independent*, video-tape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

VOLUNTEER STAFF:

Kat Aaron, Rosa Adams, Chris Anderson, Steven Arnerich, Bennett J. Baumer, Jed Brandt, Mike Burke, Antrim Caskey, Rahul Chadha, Susan Chenelle, Ellen Davidson, Ryan Dunsmuir, Sierra Freeman, Neela Ghoshal, Lauren Giambrone, A.K. Gupta, Irina Ivanova, Ruth Kelton, Jessica Lee, William Lindley, F. Timothy Martin, Gary Martin, Nik Moore, Ana Nogueira, Donald Paneth, James Powell, Nicholas Powers, Frank Reynoso, Ann Schneider, Andrew Stern, John Tarleton, Xavier Tayo, Erin Thompson, Steven Wishnia, Amy Wolf, Kurt Wong, Christina Zawerucha

events

may



Over 150 events will be held during May for Bike Month NYC. See bikemonthnyc.org. PHOTO: FRED ASKEW

FRIDAY, MAY 12

6–10pm • \$6/\$10/\$15

No one turned away

BLACK LIBERATION

Celebrate the legacy and lasting influence of the Black Panther Party. The evening's activities will include an historical overview of the Black Panther Party's origins and its impact on the rise of revolutionary spirit within post-Civil-Rights Black America. The Brecht Forum, 451 West St (between Bank & Bethune)

THURSDAY, MAY 11 – SUNDAY, MAY 14

6TH ANNUAL BICYCLE FILM FESTIVAL

Multiple Locations, Many Programs!
Pick up program at Times Up!, 49 East Houston
• bicyclefilmfestival.com

SATURDAY, MAY 13

9am – 2pm • FREE

LADIES' RIDE TO CONEY ISLAND

Grand Army Plaza entrance to Prospect Park, Brooklyn • pitonthemoon@hotmail.com

10am – 5pm • FREE

BIKE THE OLD CROTON AQUEDUCT TRAIL

Ride through Westchester County's neighborhoods, parks, forests, and even backyards on a journey to the Croton Reservoir and magnificent waterfall. Please RSVP to pcoffin@nyprr.org.

Meet at Broadway and 242nd St, Bronx

1 – 3pm • FREE

BRIDGE BATTLE 2

A fast ride over five NY Bridges that ends at the Bicycle Film Festival. 23rd St & East River Park, Manhattan • fredjips79@gmail.com

1 – 7pm • FREE

PIER SHOW 14 – TRANSFORMATIONS

Fine art show in 25,000-square-foot gallery in a Civil War-era warehouse

on the Red Hook waterfront. 300+ artists present 1000+ works of painting, sculpture, photography. Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition, 499 Van Brunt St, Brooklyn • B77 and B61 • bwacinfo@20l.com

MONDAY, MAY 15

8pm • \$5

HAYMARKET FORUM

Anthony Arnove, author of *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal*, and Deepa Fernandes, author of *Targeted: National Security and the Business of Immigration*, will explore the connections between the war abroad and the war at home and how to build a successful movement for change. The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St (at Lafayette) • Info: 212-253-9983

TUESDAY, MAY 16

8:30am – 12:30pm • FREE

URBAN RESOURCES: IMPLEMENTING RENEWABLE AND EFFICIENT ENERGY IN CITIES

Covering urban biodiesel production and use; community organizing for environmental justice and energy efficiency; urban permaculture; and solar energy in New York City. Bronx Community College, Meister Hall, Schwindler Auditorium, University Ave (at West 181st St) • babrams@sobro.org

THURSDAY, MAY 18

Noon • FREE

LOCKED OUT: DISENFRANCHISE- MENT AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen, co-authors of *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy*. The book reveals the centrality of racial factors in the origins of these laws, and their impact on politics today. 220 5th Ave (at 26th St), 5th floor

FRIDAY, MAY 19

8am – 2pm

TRIBUTE TO MALCOLM X

Gather at the Adam Clayton Powell Blvd State Office Building in Harlem and travel to his resting place in Ferncliff Cemetery in Ardsley, NY. Buses and cars will depart at 9am.

12 – 5pm

ANNUAL SHAD RIVERKEEPER FESTIVAL

A day-long program of activities, education, and entertainment aimed at raising awareness of the health of the Hudson River. For tickets and info: 1-800-21-RIVER x 231 • BoscobelRestoration.org, Garrison, NY

7pm • \$15

READINGS AND CONVERSATION WITH EDUARDO GALEANO AND ARUNDHATI ROY

The Town Hall, 123 West 43rd St (between 6th Ave & Broadway) • galeano.roy@gmail.com

MAY 22 – 30

\$10 per screening, times vary

BAMCINÉMATEK'S NEW YORK AFRICAN FILM FESTIVAL

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave, Brooklyn • 718-636-4100 or www.bam.org for tix

> Monday, May 22

4:30, 6:50, 9:15pm

AFRICA, I WILL FLEECE YOU (AFRIQUE, JE TE PLUMERAI)

(1992) Exploring the repressive political situation in director Jean-Marie Teno's native Cameroon, tracing its roots back to the beginning of the century.

> Tuesday, May 23

4:30, 6:50, 9:15pm

CHIEF!

(1999) Teno set out to make a film about a local tribal dance. But after encountering a vigilante mob

in the streets, the filmmaker switches his focus to the government that dismantles civil rights movements in the name of democracy.

> Thursday, May 25

4:30, 6:50, 9:15pm

CLANDO

(1996) "The first feature film confronting the reality of the movement for democratization in francophone Africa has a rare quality among African films in that it entirely accomplished its ambitions." —*Le Monde*

> Friday, May 26

2pm, 6:50pm

THE COLONIAL MISUNDERSTANDING (LE MALENTENDU COLONIAL)

(2004) A bold exploration of Germany's attempts to colonize parts of Africa through religion and trade.

TUESDAY, MAY 23

7pm

PLANNING MEETING FOR NEXT ISSUE OF THE INDYKIDS NEWSPAPER

Indymedia office, 4 West 43rd St, Suite 311 • Info: 212-221-0521 • indykids.net

WEDNESDAY, MAY 31

6pm • FREE

THE WILLIE MAE ROCK CAMP FOR GIRLS

Info session for campers, families, and volunteers. Plus a screening of the Global Action Project's Youth-Made Films.

Bluestockings, 172 Allen St (between Stanton & Rivington)

EVERY TUESDAY

7pm

The Independent holds open public meetings. Indymedia office 4 West 43rd St, Suite 311

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF THE INDYPENDENT?

A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

BELOW 14TH ST.

Bluestockings
Books & Café
172 Allen St.

Lotus Café
Clinton & Stanton Sts.

6th St.
Community Center
638 East 6th St.

May Day Books
Theater for the
New City
155 First Ave.
(Btw. 9th
& 10th Sts.)

Housing Works
126 Crosby St.

LGBT Center
213 W. 13th St.

Shakespeare &
Co. Books
1 Whitehall St.

Brecht Forum
451 West St.

14TH TO
96TH ST.

Revolution Books
9 W. 19th St.

Chelsea Sq. Diner
23rd St. @ 9th Ave.

Domvys
413 W. 44th St.

Second Wave
Laundroceneter
55th St. & 9th Ave.

ABOVE 96TH ST.

Labyrinth Books
536 W. 112th St.

Kim's Video
113th St. @
Broadway

Karrot
181st St. @
Cabriní

BROOKLYN

BAM
30 Lafayette Ave.

Vox Pop
1022 Cortelyou Rd.

Tillie's of
Brooklyn
248 DeKalb Ave.

Metropolitan
Laundromat
561 Metropolitan St.

El Loco Burrito
243 Bushwick Ave.

Freddy's Bar and
Backroom
Dean St.
& 6th Ave.

Community
Book Store
7th Ave.
@ Carroll Sts.

Tea Lounge
Union St. @
7th Ave.
9th St. @ 7th Ave.

Atlantis Super
Laundry Center
472 Atlantic Ave.

Photoplay Video
933 Manhattan Ave.

Verb Café
Bedford Ave.
& N. 5th

Food for Thought
Café
456 Nostrand Ave.

Veggie Castle
2242 Church Ave.

Make the Road
by Walking
301 Grove St.

Spoken Word Café
4th Ave.
& Union St.

YWCA
3rd Ave. @ Atlantic

QUEENS

Sunnyside Library
43-06
Greenpoint Ave.

Broadway Library
4020 Broadway

got a spot that's hot for the Indy?
email: imc-nyc-print@lists.indymedia.org

BRONX

Bronx Museum
165th St. & Grand
Concourse

The Point
940 Garrison Ave.

Baychester
Library
2049 Asch Loop

JERSEY CITY

Five Corners
Library
678 Newark Ave.



More than100,000 people marched down Broadway on May 1 to take a stand for immigrant rights. PHOTO: EDGAR MATA

How I Organized a May Day Shutdown

BY ANONYMOUS

I work at a Brooklyn bakery where the kitchen staff is mostly Mexican and Ecuadorian men while the retail staff is largely young, American-born women with other jobs or school on the side.

There is a clear divide not just in our language or music or work schedules but, also, in the set up: we are the “face” of the store, but the men in the “back” do the real work that makes the store run. We always find ways to lighten the mood and to get along. The guys will hide behind stuff and jump out and scare us on our way to the bathroom, or they’ll call us niñas (little girls) while we’ll call them niños (little boys), debating who is more immature. We’re friends but no one ever talks about the larger political and social system that has put us in the front and them in the back. Sometimes they talk about being tired or we’ll talk about how they work way too hard, but it never goes beyond that.

On April 29, I turned to one of my retail co-workers, Diana, and asked her what she thought about the nationwide “Day Without Immigrants” planned for May 1. We agreed that it was a great idea, but we didn’t know how many people were going to do it.

Without us really thinking it through, Diana, who speaks Spanish, went to ask one of the men about it. One guy said he really wanted to do it but the others were worried about losing a day’s pay or even being fired. Something really struck us and things just spiraled from there for the rest of our shift.

We talked to some of the other kitchen workers and they repeated their concerns about being fired. Diana and I decided to call the other retail workers who were on shift for Monday, May 1 and ask them if they would stay home if the kitchen staff needed them to. While there was some confusion at first, they all agreed that if this was going to help the kitchen staff then they would do it.

We reported back to the kitchen staff that everyone in retail would stay out of work if they would also. They looked shocked. We were talking mostly with two guys, Juan and Pedro. Juan looked at us very seriously and I could tell that he didn’t really trust that it would happen. Pedro smiled big and I felt like we were in on something together. Our group talked in circles for a while about the action, with no one really wanting to admit that it was going to happen.

For the first time in the three years of working at the bakery, we were all interacting with each other with our real emotions and together trying to find a way to make this happen.

Finally, Juan and Pedro approached John, who is the highest ranking person in the kitchen and also the closest of any staff person with the owners. One of the most important moments came when Juan was explaining in Spanish to John that he couldn’t identify who the leaders were. I could tell that Juan was already worried that he had gone too far and might lose his job even if the shutdown didn’t happen. Mostly, we all felt nervous because we agreed that our bakery is a pretty good place to work and that we like the owners. So this was not a strike against them but against the system.

Finally John agreed to call the owners. He said he was just going to say that all the kitchen and retail workers had informed him they weren’t working on Monday because they needed to go to the immigration rallies. The owners were upset, but John made our decision sound so concrete and matter-of-fact that they couldn’t really do anything other than figure out how to cancel some orders for Monday and make sure things didn’t go to waste while the store was closed.

When we returned to work on May 2, one of the owners said we should have given more notice so they have planned for the shutdown but that they understood why it was so important to us.

Among all my co-workers, there was a nice feeling of comfort and support that I hope doesn’t fade.

Class Dismissed

TEXT & PHOTO BY BENNETT BAUMER

NYU graduate student workers blocked traffic on April 27 to escalate their six-month strike for union recognition and a second contract. Though a minority of grad student workers are striking, the union, GSOC/UAW Local 2110, says that a majority of grad students support union representation. The American Arbitration Association certified a representation petition circulated by GSOC that a majority of graduate student workers signed. NYPD arrested 57 grad students and supporters during the April 27 civil disobedience. To commemorate NYU graduation, GSOC will hold a rally May 11 off of Washington Square Park with union leaders and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich.



How To Cover A Mass Movement

BY CHRIS ANDERSON

Over the past few months, newly energized immigrants-rights protesters have received a lesson in corporate media manipulation. Keeping history in mind, and drawing upon actual media coverage of the immigrant-rights protests, here are some easy rules on how to cover a mass movement.

- 1. Play by the rules, and embrace the “reasonable” alternative.**
- 2. Compare the current movement to a supposedly “purer,” earlier one... especially now that it’s no longer controversial.**

“There needs to be a lot of heavy lifting and delicate consensus building to achieve comprehensive immigration reform. Sleeping giants can, and should, get moving. But they should tread carefully.”
—New York Times editorial, 4/29/06

“[Comparisons to the Civil Rights era] are superficial. Segregation denied the legal rights and full humanity of American citizens. It was a brutal regime that had to be dismantled. By comparison, current and proposed immigration laws – even the most punitive ones – are at worst foolish, impractical and ungenerous. But they are not Jim Crow. To say otherwise is to trivialize evil.”
—New York Times editorial,, 4/29/06.

- 3. Focus on movement divisions and strains between “moderates” and “radicals,” and pretend no movement has ever been divided before.**

“Some local activists predicted that thousands of Washington area immigrants would participate in a national economic boycott today, but immigrant groups who have spoken out against the boycott said they fear that the immigration reform movement is being commandeered to promote political causes beyond immigration.”
—Washington Post, 05/01/2006

“The great upsurge in recent weeks in the Negro movement for equal rights has brought considerable strain among the leading action groups that have been engaged in it.”
—“Negroes Are Divided in Battle For Equal Rights,” New York Times, 6/23/1963

- 4. Give equal time to opponents, even if their numbers are miniscule.**

“Compared with the hundreds of thousands who marched urging Congress to consider legal status for some of the 11 million illegal immigrants in this country, far fewer went to speak for the other side. But advocates for tighter border security and increased enforcement of immigration laws said that their quieter voices were actually more representative of the views of Americans as a whole.”
—New York Times, 05/02/2006

- 5. Predict backlash – over and over and over again.**

“Anti-immigration groups warned politicians yesterday that Tuesday’s election in Herndon was the beginning of a voter backlash against local and federal immigration policy.”
—Washington Post, 05/04/2006

“Many on the other side predict a backlash.”
—New York Times, 05/01/2006

Housing Wars: Pinnacle of Greed



UPTOWN UNDER ATTACK: Disgruntled tenants from Dunbar, a landmarked apartment building in Harlem, say their home is being neglected. They also face a wave of evictions engineered by Pinnacle Group, which seeks to “agressively manage the current tenant/leasing base.” PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY

BY HEATHER HADDON

Fiol Hernandez says her daughter was scared to death the day an unidentified man showed up at her Harlem apartment demanding to inspect it. Not knowing who he was, she refused him entry. Now her landlord, Pinnacle Group, is using the incident as an excuse to try to evict Hernandez and her family.

“I am full of stress,” said Hernandez, who is facing the twin burdens of a lawsuit and difficulty walking. “When will Pinnacle’s abuses stop?”

Thousands of residents citywide are asking that same question. The Pinnacle Group and

its owner, Joel Saul Wiener, have unleashed an arsenal of threatening letters, eviction notices, and lawsuits against tenants.

Wiener’s goal, according to tenants and advocates, is to push out long-term residents, use renovations and suspicious accounting to

raise rents beyond stabilization limits, and then turn them into condos.

“Pinnacle is a monster,” said Luis Tejada of the Mirabal Sisters, a Harlem organization supporting the growing ranks of angry tenants.

BANKING ON VACANCY DECONTROL

Unscrupulous landlords have always thrived in New York. But Pinnacle is unique in its scale and financing through the Praedium Group, a real estate investment trust (REIT) on steroids. REITs have been around for decades, but only in the late 1990s did big banks get in the action – just as New York State began allowing apartments with rents exceeding \$2,000 to exit stabilization pro-

grams. A handful of banks suddenly saw Harlem and the Bronx in a whole new light.

“It’s viewed as a decent investment,” said Jerry Salama, a NYU professor and real estate expert. “The large investment banks are... going to Harlem and buying rundown multi-family homes and fixing them up.”

Credit Suisse First Boston, one of the country’s biggest investment banks, established Praedium in the nineties. One Praedium REIT, Praedium Fund V, pooled \$465 million from pensions, endowments and foundations to leverage \$1.7 billion in acquisitions, according to financial industry reports. The bulk of that went to buy New York apartment buildings.

A Praedium spokesperson said they do not comment on their individual holdings. But Kim Powell, a Pinnacle resident from Harlem, spoke candidly about Praedium, “They are not seeing that within their real estate work, there are habitants and human lives.”

Some housing experts are also wary about Praedium and its ilk. “Enron predicted growth in a certain way, and a lot of people lost money,” said Abbott Gorin, an attorney with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development who has sued Pinnacle for code violations. “Renegade actors ruin the investment for everyone. They accelerate a crash.”

Praedium is especially brash. As its website states, the company seeks “properties that are ‘broken’ and can in turn be fixed and then sold upon stabilization.” What constitutes a broken property? Not one with faulty boilers, but those that fail to “aggressively manage the current tenant/leasing base.” To fix that, it recommends “strategic capital improvements and proactive leasing.”

MEET JOEL WIENER

Who better to carry out that prescription than Joel Wiener? He comes from an old-school Brooklyn real estate family. Two children from the third generation, Arthur and Joel, carry the torch.

Their father, Paul Wiener, gave ownership of a Riverdale co-op to his children. One of the tenants, a woman who asked for anonymity because she is suing the Wieners, sought help when her roof collapsed in 1984. The damage was extensive, but the Wieners didn’t seem to care. “I could squeeze water out of my insulation. Paul said ‘I don’t see any water,’” the tenant said.

Joel has a reputation for being ruthless among many tenants. “He’s so evil. It’s just amazing,” said Laura Spalter, a Riverdale resident who fought the Wieners in the late seventies. Spalter and other residents managed to wrest control of their property, but only after extensive court proceedings.

Wiener has done well for himself. He has a fancy car and high-end office, along with a luxury home. He is flattering and laudatory to some, a snide hothead to others, according to those who have tangled with him. Spalter found that Wiener’s own lawyers often couldn’t stop his rants.

Praedium, however, has rewarded Wiener for his behavior. Beginning in 2002, they financed Pinnacle’s acquisition of entire real estate portfolios, including those owned by veteran slumlord Baruch Singer. That deal – an off-market transaction of almost 3,000 northern Manhattan apartments for \$500 million – is rumored to be one of the largest multi-family building deals in city history.

Even in the hyperactive world of city real estate, Pinnacle’s sprawling web has grown

TENANT DAVIDS TAKE ON GOLIATH

BY HEATHER HADDON

The movement against the Pinnacle Group started with a few dozen neighbors meeting over homemade lemon bars in February. It has grown quickly since.

A few years ago, tenants on Riverside Drive in Manhattan began to see disturbing patterns – the removal of their supers, apartment warehousing, lots of superficial improvements – after their buildings changed hands. When Pinnacle moved to covert two properties into co-ops, residents started sleuthing. They discovered Pinnacle had snapped up hundreds of properties citywide, and was using the same tactics elsewhere.

“We’re checking how [he’s] been

flouting the law,” said Kim Powell, a Riverside Drive resident and lawyer who has done much of the organizing.

Powell and other local residents formed Buyers and Renters United to Save Harlem (BRUSH), and began knocking on doors all over northern Manhattan. Each month, their meetings draw more residents expressing remarkably similar stories. A few local elected officials have started attending. The group is now fielding calls from Pinnacle residents all over the city, some of who have started organizing their own buildings.

Throughout the last few years, growing numbers of Hispanic supers sought help from the Mirabal Sisters, a Harlem civic organization, after they were abruptly fired by Pinnacle.

Mirabal organized a class action lawsuit against Pinnacle last year, and has joined BRUSH’s efforts. The groups held a joint protest outside Pinnacle’s plush office at 1 Penn Plaza in March.

Housing groups have started to take notice. The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, a veteran organizing group, is assessing the situation with Bronx tenants. Housing Here and Now, a city organization affiliated with ACORN, is looking into Praedium’s financing of the deals.

While energy is high, the battle ahead is formidable. Unlike some landlords, Wiener hasn’t hidden from his critics, outspokenly defending his case at local forums. He’s also hammering

against opposition. Powell says Wiener barred an independent inspector hired by tenants from doing an assessment of their building.

Local officials have pledged their support, and helped tenants on an individual basis. The city housing department says it’s looking into Pinnacle. But it will take a Herculean effort to derail Wiener’s operation.

“[They] have a tremendous amount of power,” said Paula Odellas, a resident.

The end of Governor George Pataki’s reign may offer a chance to strengthen state housing regulations, which he helped to weaken. “We need to have much tougher laws against landlords who abuse the system,” said Jeffrey Dinowitz, a Bronx Assemblyman. “It’s a real problem.”

enormously. Wiener owns thousands of apartments in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan. His company controls entire swaths of Harlem, Sugar Hill and Washington Heights, along with significant chunks of the Bronx, Upper West Side, Flatbush and Crown Heights.

In these areas, Pinnacle targets rent-stabilized properties that are a haven for low-income residents – from Hispanic families to starving artists.

WIENER'S ARMY

Wiener runs his operation with military resolve. He maintains a cadre of loyalists, and fires outsiders. Among Pinnacle's first purchases were former Mitchell-Lama buildings in the Bronx in 2002. Pinnacle proceeded to fire much of the staff within days, according to the *Daily News*. That year, the city passed a law barring new owners from firing existing staff within 90 days. Wiener has broken the rule since.

Pinnacle has fired more than 200 building supers, as stated in a class action lawsuit filed in federal court last fall. Some were forcibly removed. "[A property manger] threw a Brooklyn super down the stairs," said Luis Tejada, who spearheaded the suit with a labor law firm. "He walked away and told someone else to call an ambulance."

Most of the supers had decades of management experience. Many were replaced with inexperienced workers from Yugoslavia, according to the suit.

Frank Marino of the Marino Organization, a PR firm hired by Pinnacle, said that while staffing is done on a "building by building basis," the net result is positive. "If you look at the number of staff working in the properties, you would find an increase," he said.

Perhaps, but the property managers don't seem very attentive. "They don't even get out of their cars," said Fred Criswell, whose mother was fired by Pinnacle after it acquired a building in Inwood where she was the super.

Harry Hirsch, Wiener's right-hand man, revealed in court testimony that he had never visited a building he'd managed for years, nor could he name its super. Neither Hirsch nor Wiener keep complaint records for their buildings, nor do they have a tangible system for managing them, according to the suit. "It's kooky," stated Hirsch in his testimony. "I don't know how we do it."

FIX IT UP, PUSH 'EM OUT

When it comes to renovations, tenants say it's the supers who are on the job, not licensed contractors. A laundry room erected at 706 Riverside Dr. was condemned because of serious code violations, according to Powell. Rebecca Gilmore, Powell's neighbor, hired her own carpenter after supers doing a lead abatement left her unit mired in toxic dust. "They also lost my doors," she said. "It was really shoddy work."

All of the properties go through the same transformation: an army of security cameras are installed, mailboxes are replaced, then new front doors, lighting and other structural improvements are performed. Compared to some city slumlords, Pinnacle seems saintly.

"We're trying to bring these places back. Why see this as deceiving?" Wiener asked during an interview in which he denounced his critics. "Rather than criticize a landlord who puts in new front doors, you should provide good coverage of them."

But residents worry that the underlying goal is to push enough of them out for a condo conversion. Pinnacle tenants all over Manhattan have seen vacancies increase, and two Riverside Drive buildings are in the process of becoming condos. Pinnacle says they are generously allowing current tenants to buy their homes. Few can afford the prices, however.

"They are trying to sell apartments for over \$1 million in buildings with bad pipes and elevators that are always down," said Paula Odellas, a resident.

Pinnacle does make plenty of major capital improvements, like new windows and boilers. Some of these repairs, which create permanent rent increases, are necessary. Others appear fabricated say tenants. A former Bronx super was told to futz with the electrical plates in his building, and bill for an entire rewiring, according to a source close to the situation.

The company intended to replace the entryways at 2300 Olinville Ave. in the Bronx without any obvious need. "I don't want a new door," said Joseph Brown, standing next to his solid entryway.

The needs of current residents are at the mercy of Praedium's drive to "aggressively manage the current tenant base." In that spirit, Pinnacle frequently takes residents to housing court. The suits are for back rent, but also use creative charges like rent checks using a married name instead of the maiden one, according to tenants. Kim Smith, who worked as staffer for former Councilman Bill Perkins, was shocked to find that a large per-



HOLDING ON: Fred Perry and his wife Tomasina inside their Pinnacle-owned apartment at Dunbar. PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY

centage of residents in a 149th Street building were served court papers. According to city Housing Court records, Pinnacle has initiated over 1,500 cases in the Bronx alone since 2002.

Pinnacle disputes that number, but has yet to provide a different total.

People on rent subsidies, including the elderly, have been a frequent target. Bronx Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz helped a 90-year-old Riverdale resident after Wiener sued him for back rent. Dinowitz's staff found that the man had actually overpaid through credits from a state program assisting low-income seniors living in regulated apartments.

"He was double dipping," Dinowitz said. Wiener has since said the property is owned by his brother, but Dinowitz's staff says the management is one and the same.

"THE LANDLORDS HAVE THE EDGE"

New tenants have also encountered problems. Those who request documentation of renovations – typically assessed at \$25,000 per unit – sometimes learn that their apartments supposedly contain half-a-dozen toilets or hundreds of sheets of drywall.

Erica Martinez, a resident of 801 Riverside Dr., received a court-ordered rent rebate of \$300 a month after bogus bills were nullified. "He tried to put all the construction supplies for the whole building onto my apartment," she said.

Frank Marino said the state Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), which oversees rent-stabilized apartments, would never approve inflated bills. "DHCR

has been through this thousands of times," he said. "They know what a realistic ballpark figure is."

They might, but DHCR is notoriously lax. "When a landlord goes to DHCR, they get quick results," Dinowitz said. "When a tenant goes to them, it can take years. In every way, the landlords have the edge."

DHCR punished Pinnacle for overcharging two Bronx tenants, but the agency dismissed future suits when the company issued a building-wide credit due to a "clerical error," as letters to tenants stated. When Denise Prescod, a Riverside Drive tenant, went to DHCR to check if she was being overcharged, her unit had no listed rent history. DHCR also can't determine the number of times a landlord has been sued for overcharges, as the agency "does not compile or maintain such information," as stated in a letter.

"DHCR is of no help," Prescod said dryly.

Peter Moses, a DHCR spokesperson, said he had "little luck" in getting the depart-

ment's history of oversight for several Pinnacle buildings. Then he asked, nervously: "Are you really going to write about them?"

CULTIVATING POLITICAL ALLIES

There are no records of campaign contributions from Pinnacle, but Wiener likes to cultivate influential political allies. "Their strategy is to say they have friends in high places," said former Councilman Perkins, who was approached for support by Wiener while he was in office.

Perkins says he received a call from Ken Fisher, a lobbyist from a politically connected Brooklyn family, to tout Pinnacle's merits. Earlier this year, Pinnacle also made a \$500,000 contribution to Youth Turn, a group run by Rev. C. Vernon Mason, a disbarred lawyer and ally of Rev. Al Sharpton.

But most of Wiener's sense of entitlement comes from within. "He's extremely aggressive," said Spalter, the Riverdale resident who fought Wiener successfully. "Any group that wants to fight Joel has to have several fronts going on at once."

Many Pinnacle tenants are pragmatic. They know that prices will go up and neighborhoods will change. But they are indignant at being driven out of areas that have only now healed from years of crime and neglect. "You can't expect to continue paying \$200 [in rent]," said Marjorie Moore, a tenant at 725 Riverside Dr. "But we are looking at regional planning that is seeking to relocate us. Wiener wouldn't have these buildings if we hadn't stayed here to preserve them."

Taking On Your Landlord

"If you know New York City

landlords... they are the worst

human beings on earth."

—Donald Trump

BY BENNETT BAUMER

Landlords take thousands of New York City tenants to housing court every year. But tenants can fight back by starting a tenant association to improve living conditions in their building and neighborhood, and even bring the landlord to court for repairs.

FORMING A TENANT ASSOCIATION

You have a right to form a tenant association. Talk to your neighbors to set them at ease and find out what your common problems are. Don't be embarrassed if you have mice and roaches, others probably have them also. Post fliers, call a meeting and get a tenant organizer to come and offer guidance. Groups like Met Council on Housing (212) 979-6238 can help.

GETTING REPAIRS DONE

- (1) Call Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) at 311. They will come and inspect your apartment, but the landlord does not have to make the repairs.
- (2) For rent-regulated tenants (buildings with 6 or more units built between 1947-1974), send a certified letter to the landlord detailing repairs to be made. Ten days later, file for rent reductions with the state housing agency, the Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR). Note: DHCR is slow to move on behalf of tenants.
- (3) Go on rent strike! Consult a tenant organizer and a lawyer before withholding rent building-wide to make sure your case is solid.

FIGHTING RENT INCREASES (Rent-regulated tenants)

- (1) Testify before the Rent Guidelines Board and tell them why your landlord doesn't need an increase.
- (2) Call the DHCR (718) 739-6400 for a "rent history". You might have a rent overcharge case based on fraudulent renovations among other things.
- (3) Apply for a DHCR rent reduction based on lack of services and repairs.
- (4) You'll need a tenant organizer's assistance to beat back major capital improvements and other schemes.

EVICCTIONS

- (1) Keep good records, get advice from tenant groups, hire a tenant lawyer (if feasible). If you're eligible call Legal Aid at (888) 218-6947 or Legal Services (646) 442-3100.
- (2) Keep an eye out for fraudulent claims of "interior demolitions" or "owner occupancy" evictions.
- (3) People with HIV are entitled to housing. Call NYCAHN at (718) 802-9540 or City Wide Task Force on Housing Court (212) 962-4795.

Bennett Baumer is a tenant organizer for the Metropolitan Council on Housing (metcouncil.net)

Immigrants Rising in Brooklyn

A smell of wet garbage emanated from a paste of rotten fruit, cucumbers and smashed olives that clung to the sidewalk in front of Amersino Marketing Group, an anonymous building amid a row of squat warehouses in Ridgewood, Queens. Like most mornings, on Monday May 1, Eliezer Maca arrived at 5:30 a.m. at the warehouse, where he spends six days a week loading trucks ferrying supplies to New York's Chinese restaurant industry.

Today, however, Maca was not here to work. Having been fired on April 29 by the owner, he was flanked by a handful of youthful, scarlet-embazoned members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and a dozen co-workers, forming an enthusiastic picket line. It was the fifth such picket at the company in as many weeks, as workers took to heart the direct action and worker-lead strikes characteristic of the IWW.

"He fire me because I cancel too [many] peo-

ple," said Maca, who as the observer for the April 28 union election, had invalidated ballots cast by people he said did not work at the company. "Never I see the people," said Maca, referring to the workers he claimed were brought in by the owner that day. "I working for him three years – and I know who work and who [doesn't] work in this company."

These Hispanic immigrant workers are members of the IWW and part of the Despierta Bushwick campaign, launched by Bushwick community organization Se Hace Camino Al Andar (Make the Road By Walking), which through its campaigns to unionize Bushwick's wholesale and retail sectors, has demonstrated how issues of economic justice and immigrants' rights are intertwined.

THE WAGES OF IMMIGRANTS

The interconnection is visible on Knickerbocker Avenue in Bushwick, which is lined with dis-

count stores that sell to Latin American immigrants earning low wages. The main thoroughfare has been nicknamed "the street of shame" for store owners' routine violation of minimum wage laws.

Bert Picard, a Make the Road member active in the IWW campaign, says it "seems that there's a de facto new minimum wage for immigrants" who by his calculations often earn under \$5.00 an hour. The New York state minimum wage is currently \$6.75 an hour and will rise to \$7.15 in 2007.

In December 2004, Make the Road launched its Despierta Bushwick campaign – Awake Bushwick – to combat the endemic illegal labor practices in the neighborhood.

Prior to that, Make the Road By Walking focused on helping immigrant members "reclaim or defend their workplace rights," said co-director Andrew Friedman. "A lot of times we'd work with people once they'd already

been fired to help them get back wages and overtime pay."

The campaign was launched after a prolonged struggle to recover back wages for workers from a local retailer Minimax. Workers who said they had endured years of abuse, sub-minimum wages, overtime violations and unfair firings. They approached Make the Road about their situation and after six months of boycotts, protests and leafleting, eight workers reached a settlement with the owner in 2004 to receive \$65,000 total in back wages and overtime pay.

It was a major victory for the workers, but, "we weren't strong enough to get them rehired. We didn't have the power to force them [the owner] to take them back," said Picard.

When organizers interviewed workers in the neighborhood, "the vast majority of them said, 'We want significant wage increases and we want health insurance,'" according to Friedman. "We felt like we would not be able to get those two things unless we collaborated with the union."

The group began reaching out to unions, eventually forming a partnership with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) to unionize Bushwick's retail sector and with the IWW to unionize workers in the wholesale sector.

The Despierta Campaign mobilized a door-knocking campaign to educate the community about their efforts for fair labor practices and to gather pledges to support boycotts against local businesses exploiting workers.

When the project began a boycott of Super Star 99, whose owner was paying workers \$4 an hour, the store was shut down for a week. Eventually, the owner tried to close down the store, only to be ordered by New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer to reopen, rehire workers and pay \$70,000 in back wages. Workers in Action also managed to win \$28,000 for four employees of S and S Farm, a greengrocer that paid its workers \$340 or less for 70-hour workweeks.

The group then began organizing the Footco shoe chain, which has 10 stores across the city, including two on Knickerbocker. The owner was paying workers \$4 an hour with no overtime, health benefits, paid vacation or sick days. The group threatened a community boycott of the store, and the owner, having seen the effect of the campaign against Super Star 99, quickly signed an agreement.

"I remember when we announced that we [were starting] to do demonstration in front of the store. They called us and said... stop doing that and they signed a good business agreement," said Make the Road organizer Nieves Padilla. The owner of the store promised to "respect the community... respect the campaign," said Padilla. "If the worker desires to be unionized they're going to respect that. ... Finally after the few months, we got the first local union in Bushwick."

Make the Road reached an agreement with Footco for it to pay \$410,000 in back pay for wage and overtime violations. All 10 stores and an estimated 100 workers are now unionized with a three-year contract that guarantees \$7.25 an hour, paid vacation and sick leave, health insurance for their families and mandatory breaks. The RWDSU is now looking to launch another major campaign on Knickerbocker.

In organizing workers and focusing on improving life for the community as a whole, Made the Road By Walking and the two unions have set themselves apart from many other union campaigns, which often, though not always, fail to involve community groups, and focus on larger chains and corporations, rather than small businesses.



Four immigrant workers who were fired for union activity at the Amersino restaurant supply business. They are part of the Despierta Bushwick campaign launched by the community organizing group Make the Road By Walking, which is helping immigrants unionize in the wholesale/retail sector in Bushwick. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Manual Lopez, Antonio Rodriguez, Rene Pulido and Diego Lezama. **PHOTOS:** ANDREW STERN

WHOLESALE ORGANIZING

"We believe that every worker, if they need help, we are here to provide that," said Padilla, who heads the Despierta Bushwick campaign. "It doesn't matter where they work." Indeed, Despierta Bushwick is moving beyond the neighborhood retail sector.

Teresa Perez, an immigrant from Mexico and a member of Make the Road began working a few months ago as a cashier at K. Bread & Co., a mid-Manhattan coffee shop.

She said workers received "extremely bad treatment" from the owner. Perez was being paid \$6 an hour working without overtime for a 48-hour workweek.

"He yelled at us, he gave us too much work," said Orlando Guevera, a dishwasher and cashier at K. Bread and Co. who emigrated from Mexico three years ago. He was being paid \$6.50 an hour for 60-hour weeks with no overtime.

Perez brought her complaint to Make the Road By Walking, and with the help of the Industrial Workers of the World, the workers started unionizing. They now have a union, are being paid minimum wage and overtime, and are waiting to negotiate a contract. Perez and other workers are demanding paid holidays, sick days and vacation days and an increase in wages "because \$6.75 is not a living wage."

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF BUSHWICK UNITE

"[We want] better pay, benefits, holidays, and [above] everything, dignity and respect for the immigrants," said Antonio Rodriguez, who was fired for defending Eliezer Maca at Amersino. "We are here to work – and we need more respect."

Rodriguez is an immigrant from Mexico and says doesn't he really like the United States but came in order to earn enough money to go to college. "I don't have money in Mexico so that's why I am here," said Rodriguez. "Maybe in... three years I would like to go back to Mexico to study medicine."



Members of Workers in Action meet at Make the Road By Walking to discuss their organizing campaigns. **PHOTO:** ANDREW STERN

Until a few months ago, when unionizing activities started, Rodriguez was working 60 hours a week, but making only \$330. For these workers, unionizing is one of the only means of getting paid the legal minimum wage. Rodriguez now makes \$6.75 an hour. According to IWW organizer Billy Randel, the workers at Amersino began receiving the minimum wage in late March, after the union made a demand for recognition.

After being approached by the IWW and Make the Road, the workers, who had filed a complaint with the state department of labor about minimum wage violations, decided to form a union. On Friday, April 28, they held an election. The next morning, Eliezer Maca, an immigrant from Mexico who had been observing the election for the union, was fired when he showed up to work.

Owner Yu Qing Wang admitted that he had been violating minimum wage law in the past, but that he was now paying the minimum wage. "That's not true," he said when asked if he currently violated minimum wage law. "Before maybe, but we are making the correction already," he told *The Independent*.

Wang denied that this "correction" had anything to do with the union, saying, "We already tell the people that because of a minimum wage law we may have to make certain corrections and do what the right thing to do – not because of the union."

But the battle has been difficult for the workers. Union members returned to work on May 3 after negotiating with Wang. He refused to take back Maca or Rodriguez and fired two more unionized employees.

On May 8, a week after their last picket, the IWW arrived at Amersino at 5 a.m., to show support for the workers who had gone back to work the week before. They were expecting the fired workers to join them on a picket line, but most were out looking for work. Maca was the only one who showed up. But, he expressed hope and saw the recent immigrants' rights movement as a sign that many like him were ready for a change.

"People have been working here for a long time," said Maca in Spanish. "They want some change... to have the opportunity for a better chance at making a living and raising family here. And they can't do that without a change in the law."

BUSHWICK BATTLES BACK

Tapping into the power of direct action, community boycotts and grassroots organizing, Make the Road By Walking's workplace justice campaigns have escalated since 2003 from fighting for the enforcement of minimal labor standards to full-scale efforts to unionize previously exploitative businesses.

MINIMAX – MARCH 2004

Eight workers win \$65,000 in back wages. The workers had endured verbal abuse, wage and overtime violations and some claimed they were unfairly terminated.

S AND S FARM – MARCH 2005

Greengrocer employees working 70 hour weeks for 300 and 340 dollars a week, win \$28,852 in back wages. The workers now receive overtime and minimum wage, allowing them to work 24 fewer hours a week for the same amount of money.

SUPER STAR 99 INC.; LESS & PLUS DISCOUNT INC.; JIMMY 99 CENTS INC. – AUGUST 2005

Employees of the three stores win \$70,000 in back wages. Workers now receive minimum wage and overtime pay, and are given three paid sick days and three vacation days per year.

FOOTCO USA – JANUARY 2006

Ninety-five workers win \$410,000 in back wages for overtime and minimum wage violations and all 10 stores in the city are successfully unionized. The new contract was signed in January 2006 – workers now receive \$7.25 an hour, vacation and sick days, health insurance and an employee discount, as well as guaranteed five hours a week of overtime.

K. BREAD & CO — IWW WINS UNION ELECTION APRIL 7

Fourteen workers at this Midtown bakery successfully organize a union, and are now being paid minimum wage and overtime, and are waiting to negotiate a contract with benefits, that include paid holidays, sick days and vacations.

EZ SUPPLY CO. – IWW WINS UNION ELECTION FEBRUARY 9

At this wholesale restaurant supply and food company, 23 workers decide to unionize after approaching Make the Road with complaints of wage minimum violations and a lack of respect for the workers. The workers held two strikes during the unionizing effort and are now in contract negotiations.

AMERSINO MARKETING GROUP, LLC – IWW HOLDS UNION ELECTIONS APRIL 28

Workers at this wholesale food supply company begin unionizing in February 2006, claiming wage and overtime violations against the owner, who had been paying workers as little as \$300 for 60-hour weeks. Since the union made a demand for recognition in March, the owner has raised wages to \$6.75 an hour.

—ERIN THOMPSON



Eliezer Maca, former employee of Amersino Marketing Group, stands outside the Ridgewood, Queens warehouse where he was recently fired for union activities. **PHOTO:** EDGAR MATA

The American Nightmare

Six years ago, while working for \$5.75 an hour at an automobile parts manufacturer in Brooklyn, "Bernardin Gonzalez" collapsed and had to be taken to the hospital on a stretcher. Due to the extensive damage done to his kidneys, Gonzalez, an immigrant from Mexico, now has to undergo dialysis three times a week.

Gonzalez had been exposed to paints, thinners and chemical residues while working in the Superflex factory which had no ventilation and no regard for safety standards.

"I was working with chemicals with no protection," said Gonzalez, speaking through a translator. "There was no lunch time, no time to go to the bathroom, we ate with dirty hands because there was no time to clean up," he said. Gonzalez spent three months in the hospital, and was eventually fired from the plant, for having health problems. "When I came out of the hospital, even my few belongings they had thrown out of the house, it was really terrible," he said.

Gonzalez said he felt "completely defrauded" by what has happened to him. He can only perform light labor and in order to cover the \$2,000-a-month cost of treatment, Gonzalez has to apply for temporary Medicaid every two months.

"There were times when I used to have to walk all the way to Coney Island for dialysis because I didn't have a subway token," he said. Once, he said, he walked for two or three hours and he passed out, ending up back in the hospital. "It's

been hard, there's been many a day when I just bought an Italian bread and just had that and a glass of water all day."

After six years, Gonzalez is "still waiting for justice" and for the \$62,000 in worker's compensation he won in December 2004 after suing Superflex. He is still waiting for a trial date on his second suit for damages. Gonzalez credits Make the Road with helping him "in all aspects" – giving him financial support and finding him a good lawyer to fight his case, and is a member of the group's Workplace Justice Project.

"This type of struggle I feel it's my duty to help," said Gonzalez of his participation in Make the Road. "I had a bad experience that I don't want anyone else to go through it."

While Gonzalez's experience might not be typical of all immigrants, it speaks volumes about the divide between the belief many immigrants have about America before they arrive, and the reality. "Most of the people that I know whether it's because they don't have papers, don't speak English or they're sick, none of them are prospering like we thought," said Gonzalez.

"When I left my country, like everybody, I believed in the American dream," he said. "Here I came to know that it's not the American dream, it's the nightmare."

—ERIN THOMPSON

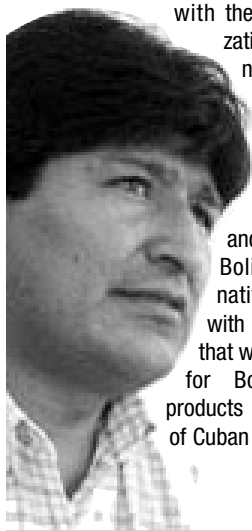
World briefs

ZAPATISTA BASTION UNDER ATTACK, MARCOS SUSPENDS THE OTHER CAMPAIGN

In response to police violence, Subcomandante Marcos has suspended The Other Campaign, a national tour to unite leftist groups and draw attention to the Zapatista struggle. Marcos has vowed to stay in the embattled towns of San Salvador Atenco and Texcoco, Mexico, where police and farmers clashed when flower growers tried to set up a market in Texcoco on land that is believed to be coveted by Wal-Mart. The farmers are backed by Marcos as well as residents of nearby San Salvador Atenco, who successfully resisted the building of a new Mexico City airport in 2002. On May 3, San Salvador Atenco residents blocked the highway between the two towns to stop the onslaught of police. According to Narconews.com, police severely beat protesters, taking aim at their groins to maximize damage. Police shot and killed a 14-year-old boy, left dozens injured and arrested more than 100.

BOLIVIA RECLAIMS GAS RESERVES ON MAY DAY

Bolivia President Evo Morales (below) has ordered the nationalization of the South American country's gas reserves. Acting on pressure from his leftist base, Morales sent the military into 56 gas facilities on May 1 and decreed that foreign companies have six months to negotiate new contracts with the state. The nationalization of gas resources, not to be confused with expropriation of refineries and other assets, further aligned Morales' Bolivia with Venezuela and Cuba. On April 29, Bolivia signed an alternative free trade pact with those two countries that will open new markets for Bolivia's agricultural products and send thousands of Cuban doctors to Bolivia.



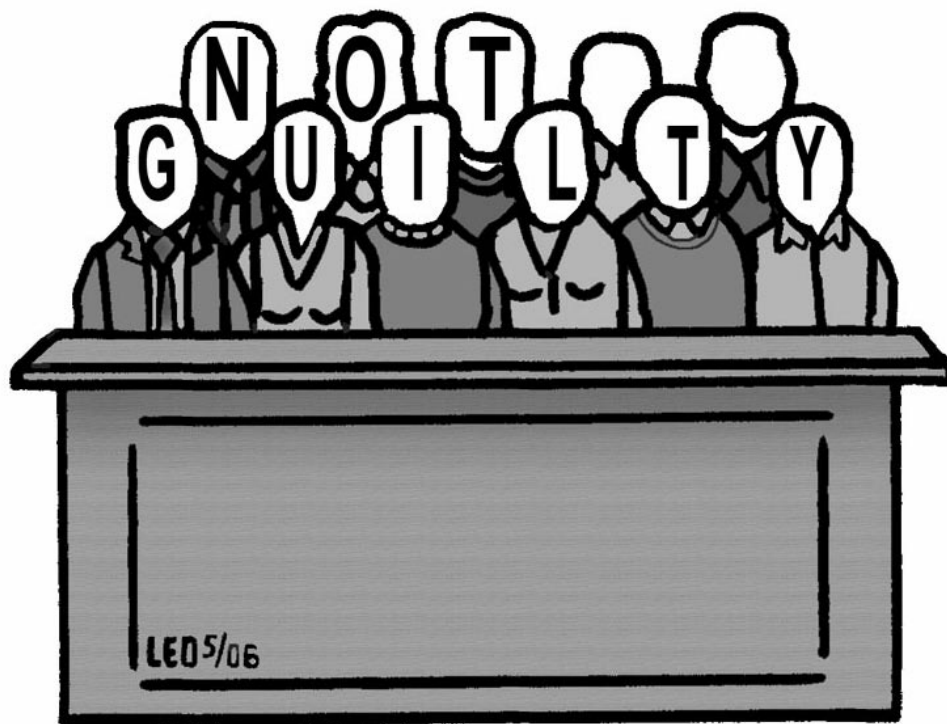
HUMALA LAGS, AMID QUESTIONS ON HIS POPULISM

Ollanta Humala, the left-wing populist who won the first round of Peru's presidential elections, now trails former president Alan Garcia in advance of a June 4 runoff. Polls show Humala trailing by 8 to 14 points as he continues to fend off questions about his family's connections to a racial supremacist group and his role as an army officer during the Peruvian government's 1980s war against the Shining Path guerrilla movement. But Humala is distancing himself from his family, and has won supporters by bucking free trade policies. "We've been exploited for more than 500 years by the Spaniards and now by the multinationals, some of which don't even pay taxes or royalties. This has

to change," Humala said in a newspaper interview.

GLACIERS THAW INTO SAND

The glaciers of the Tibetan plateau in Asia are diminishing 50 percent every decade according to The Chinese Academy of Sciences. The breadth of the shrinkage is staggering, as the plateau contains 46,298 glaciers covering almost 60,000 sq. miles and its melted runoff could fill the Yellow River every year. Under the tundra is a vast desert that has already begun to produce blinding sand storms that cause air pollution and blanket entire provinces in dirt. "The melting glaciers will ultimately trigger more droughts, expand desertification and increase sand storms," said academy scientist Dong Guangrong.



Terrorist prosecutions fall apart

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

The jury verdict that spared Zacarias Moussaoui the death penalty is one in a string of dramatic defeats the Department of Justice has received at the hands of the people.

The government has consistently exaggerated the importance of each alleged terrorist it has tried to prosecute, only to see its claims fall far short when they are subjected to the scrutiny of the judicial system.

A report prepared by Syracuse University shows that after Sept. 11, federal investigators recommended the prosecution of 6,400 individuals as potential terrorists. Only 379 convictions were obtained, and of these, only 14 had any ties to al Qaeda. Among all of the "international terrorism" convictions, Syracuse found that the median sentence imposed was only 14 days. The most common convictions were for fraud, lying to the government and passport violations. Included in the DoJ's classification of anti-terrorism prosecutions were 65 Middle Eastern students who paid stand-ins to take their college entrance exams.

Arrested in August, 2001 on an immigration violation while attending a Minnesota flight school, Moussaoui was in jail on Sept. 11, 2001. Moussaoui ultimately plead guilty to the allegations that he had knowledge about the impending attacks, but the trial demonstrated that many persons within the FBI were equally guilty of failing to use their knowledge to prevent or disrupt the attacks. Had Moussaoui not decided to plead guilty, the jury may have acquitted him. We know this because in their detailed verdict form, three jurors wrote they did not believe he had any significant role in the Sept. 11 plot. In the guilt phase of the trial, jurors are required to say which, if any, factors they found to mitigate or aggravate his guilt. The detail they provided seriously undermines the central contentions of the case.

On May 4, a federal judge declared a mistrial after a jury deadlocked on whether Osama Awadallah lied to a grand jury investigating his possible relationship to Sept. 11 hijacker Khalid al-Mihdhar.

Awadallah was the unlucky San Diego student whom the government chose to use to test the limits of its material witness statute

three years ago. Judge Shira Scheindlin withstood intense political pressure to insist he either be released or brought to trial. Awadallah will face a retrial.

Meanwhile, the trial of 23-year-old Shahawar Siraj continues, with the defense vigorously cross-examining the main witness against Siraj, a government informer who was paid \$100,000 to infiltrate mosques in Brooklyn and Staten Island (a clear violation of the law). The evidence elicited so far supports the entrapment defense, in that the informer, Osama Eldawood, incited the young man with photos of Abu Ghraib, stoked his ego, and provided the knowledge of how to build a bomb. (Eldawood is an Egyptian-born nuclear engineer). To win an acquittal, the defense must show that Siraj has no violent tendencies of his own. Because this essentially involves having to disprove a negative, the entrapment defense is rarely successful. The trial should continue for two more weeks. (Observers are welcome in courtroom 6D at 225 Cadman Plaza, every Monday through Thursday.)

For more, see nlgnyc.org.

CRITICS SAY NUCLEAR DANGER AS GREAT AS EVER

'Schell' Shocked

BY DONALD PANETH

Are the criticisms of nuclear power and the warnings about the possible uses of nuclear weapons just old stuff, or are these questions worthy of consideration today?

Two veterans of the anti-nuclear movement — Dr. Helen Caldicott and Jonathan Schell — addressed these issues at the New School on May 4. Caldicott and Schell have been working on, speaking out and writing about these matters for the past 30 years.

Yet the auditorium in which they appeared was three-quarters empty. Only about 100 persons, mostly middle-aged or aged, attended. At a liberal institution of higher learning, a handful of young people showed up.

"We're in a most dangerous situation," said Caldicott, author of *Nuclear Madness* (1979), *The New Nuclear Danger* (2001), and other books. And she observed: "There is no moral

outrage in this country. We're all walking around as if nothing's going on."

Schell stressed the "indivisibility of nuclear issues. We have no protection against the dangers of either nuclear power or nuclear weapons. We have not succeeded in illuminating the hazards of nuclear power or the possibilities of nuclear proliferation."

Caldicott declared that the mass media — *Fox News*, *CNN*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* — are endangering us all by not discussing the hazards of the nuclear age and the changes required in human behavior.

Schell, whose 1982 classic *The Fate of the Earth* helped fuel the nuclear freeze movement, said that he had recently taught students at Yale who were "absolutely free of knowledge," though he had "sensed a desire among them for knowledge" about these matters.

"Nuclear power is the only source of elec-

tricity that could destroy a city," Caldicott said. She called for the shutdown of the Indian Point nuclear reactors operating in Buchanan, N.Y., 40 miles from Times Square, 20 miles from the Bronx.

She also noted that the problem of nuclear waste disposal remains unsolved.

Schell recalled that the nuclear freeze movement of the 1980s had been "encouraging," but that following the collapse of the Soviet Union "nothing happened. Arms control actually slowed."

People drifted along without responding, he said, "impervious to events."

Once again, as they had so often in the past, Caldicott and Schell urged the abolition of nuclear arsenals.

"It should be done — abolition," she said.

"Of course, we can get rid of nuclear weapons," he said. "We need people of sagacity and wisdom."

THE
PEOPLE'S
LAWYER

a project of the National Lawyers Guild NYC

Telecoms Push for Net Takeover

BY BILL D. HERMAN
PHILADELPHIA IMC

The Internet as we know it is endangered. If Verizon, Comcast and other broadband companies get their way in Congress, the Internet may soon become a cable-TV type service in which only selected sites are available at top speeds and corporate content is favored at the expense of everyone else.

Today's broadband user can download and upload content as fast as the network can transmit it. The major exception is pricing for performance. Many broadband service providers (BSPs) sell digital subscriber line or cable modem service at different speeds for different prices.

Whatever the service, users can access free services and software at the same speed as for-profit products. The explosion in useful online tools like blogs, Wikipedia, Indymedia, and BitTorrent is a direct result of people creating, sharing and adopting whatever technologies they find the most useful.

Instead of this meritocracy, broadband companies want to create an Internet of tiered access for content providers. H.R. 5252, authored by Rep. Joe Barton (R-Tex.), embodies this wish.

Barton's bill insists "consumers are entitled to access the lawful Internet content of their choice," but it doesn't prohibit BSPs from favoring some content (for a fee) and slowing others. Barton's bill even strips the Federal Communications Commission of authority to impose such regulations. It also leaves untouched a federal statute (47 U.S.C. § 230) that permits Internet service providers to censor any "objectionable" content.

If Barton's current bill passes, corporations like Disney, ESPN and Amazon will hog the fast lane on the information superhighway, paying extra to blast content down (emphasis on down) your broadband pipe at top speed.

For instance, Verizon is deploying fiberoptic service with downstream speeds of up to 30 megabytes per second, over 500 times as fast as dial-up. Barton's bill would allow Verizon to charge for high-speed transmission. Content providers who don't cough up the toll money would be relegated to perhaps one-tenth the speed.

Those who pay will have something to sell or advertise; everyone else will be in the slow lane. Telecommunications executives agree: this is their

future business model. AT&T CEO Ed Whitacre demanded that companies like Google, Yahoo and Vonage start paying to reach his customers. "Cable companies have [broadband pipes]. We have them. Now what they would like to do is use my pipes free, but I ain't going to let them... The Internet can't be free in that sense."

Already e-businesses pay mammoth bandwidth fees to their own network providers, and end users pay to download this content. Whitacre and his company are inventing a third revenue stream: they want us to pay them not to interfere.

Broadband companies can set up online tollbooths because the market is non-competitive. In the largest cities, cable and phone companies enjoy a near-total broadband duopoly, and the competition gets worse from there. Almost half the population has access to just one or no broadband providers.

Imagine how fees would affect the next big online tool, one that requires next-generation broadband speeds. Inventors would have to pay broadband providers and hope for near-overnight adoption by paying users. Few startups and no nonprofits could afford this. Many valuable inventions would be sent abroad or buried. Many more would never be developed.

Firefox, Wikipedia, and Indymedia are just three examples of collaborative online tools developed because they are good for society, not good for paying the mortgage. Nonprofits, researchers, educators, and all levels of government are improving our lives

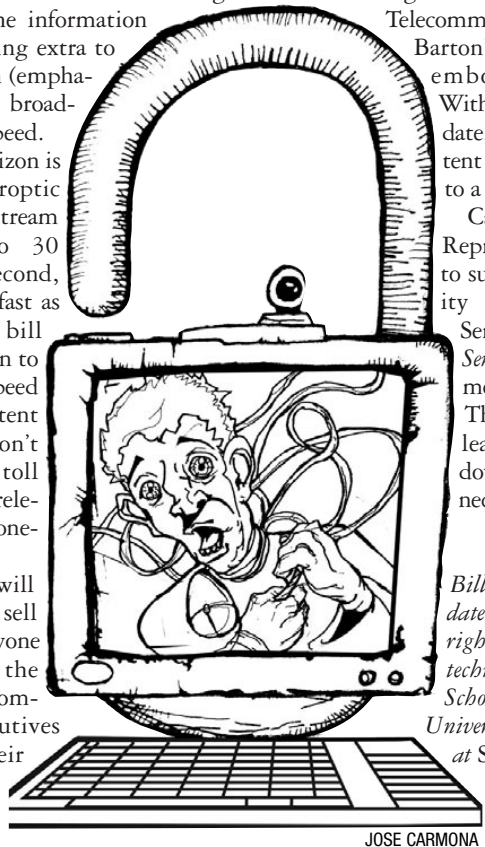
with free online content and services. None of these groups can afford Whitacre's extortion.

Finally, consider the potential for Internet censorship. Last July, Canadian telecom giant Telus blocked its 1 million customers from accessing a website supporting the striking

Telecommunications Workers Union. Barton's weak, vague bill may embolden online censorship. Without a clear neutrality mandate, BSPs could cut off any content as "objectionable" or slow it to a crawl.

Call your Senators and Representative today. Tell them to support the network neutrality bills in the House and Senate. Find their numbers at Senate.gov and House.gov. Find more details on these bills at Thomas.loc.gov. For now, at least, these websites will download as fast as your connection allows.

Bill D. Herman is a Ph.D. candidate studying media policy, copyright law and communication technology at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. He blogs at ShoutingLoudly.com.



JOSE CARMONA

An Evening of Readings
and Conversation with
EDUARDO GALEANO
AND
ARUNDHATI ROY
Presented by The Center for
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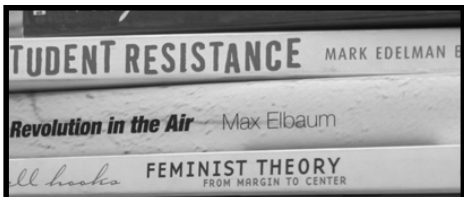
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THU, MAY 18 @ 7PM • \$3 TO \$5 SUGGESTED

DISCUSSION: MARTA KOLAROVA

"CZECH ANARCHISM AND ANARCHA-FEMINISM"

Marta Kolarova will discuss the history and development of the anarchist movement in Czechoslovakia.

FRIDAY, MAY 19 @ 7PM - \$5 TO \$7 SUGGESTED

DISCUSSION: "NOTHING SEXY ABOUT STREET HARASSMENT"

Laura Beth Neilsen, author of *License to Harass*, and a panel of activists from across NYC will discuss street harassment's impact on women, and show how the law plays a role in normalizing it. Hosted by *HollabackNYC.com*, a blog dedicated to ending street harassment in NYC.

SUN MAY 21 @ 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED

REVOLUTIONARY STORY TELLING: PAM AFRICA

Pam Africa leads the movement to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, and has earned the title of MOVE's Minister of Confrontation.

THU MAY 25 @ 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED

SCREENING: GRUPO ALAVIO *THROUGH THE LENS*

A member of the Argentine direct action and video collective Grupo Alavio will present several short films about Argentina, with a particular focus on the country's occupied factory movement.

TUE MAY 30 @ 7PM • \$3 - \$5 SUGGESTED

WOMEN'S POETRY JAM & WOMEN'S OPEN MIKE

Featuring: Leslie Feinberg & Daisy Hulme

Open mike sign-up starts at 7PM, so come and deliver (up to) 8 minutes of your poetry, prose, songs, and spoken word.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 31 @ 7PM • FREE

SCREENING: GLOBAL ACTION PROJECT "YOUTH-MADE FILMS"

Join four young, emerging filmmakers from the Global Action Project, a social justice media organization that trains young people to create and use media as a catalyst for dialogue and lights the ongoing struggle to gain equality for all. Followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers.

film



SCENT OF A MAYOR: A glamorous Giuliani seduces The Donald.

RUDY TIME: WHAT A DRAG

GIULIANI TIME

DIRECTED BY KEVIN KEATING (2006)

Rudolph Giuliani's eight years as mayor of New York bridged two political eras: the racially coded politics of the late 20th century, which targeted the "pathological" African-American poor as Public Enemy No. 1, and the post-9/11 police state, which transformed dissenters into "terrorist" suspects.

Of course, the conventional wisdom lauds Giuliani as "the man who cleaned up New York" and "the hero of 9/11." Kevin Keating's new documentary, *Giuliani Time*, deconstructs that legend with a mix of interviews, period news footage and the occasional bit of Michael Moore-style humor.

The film follows Giuliani's rise from the son of a small-time mobster to a federal prosecutor in the Reagan administration, where he gained prominence for his vindictive pursuit of mobsters and Haitian refugees. It tracks his mayoralty from the unofficial opening of his 1993 campaign, leading a mob of white cops in shouting "Bullshit" at City Hall (then occupied by David Dinkins, New York's first black mayor), to his political collapse in 2000, when cancer and much-publicized marital problems forced him to drop out of a Senate race against Hillary Clinton.

Crime-fighting is the cornerstone of the Giuliani legend. In 1990 and 1991, with the rampant crack trade spawning hundreds of lethal business disputes, the city averaged six murders a day. Giuliani supporters such as Myron Magnet of the Manhattan Institute, his main advocate in this film, point to the numbers: By the time Giuliani left office, crime had dropped to the levels of the mid-'60s, with murders below three a day.

Did his policies – in particular, "quality of life" policing, prosecuting small offenses like public drinking and pot-smoking (and even reviving a Prohibition-era ban on dancing in bars!) – really bring it down in New York? William Bratton, Giuliani's first police commissioner (who admits he never got along with the mayor) cites the use of computers to pinpoint high-crime locations – and the 6,000 new police officers hired by Dinkins.

"Quality of life" policing was actually most successful in reducing the perception of crime. Giuliani's campaign against the menace of "squeegee men" epitomized this; it played to the fears of white car owners who were so terrified of being accosted by a

ragged-looking Black man that they wanted them all locked up.

But the racial subtext of Giuliani's policies eventually caused his political downfall. Though the Abner Louima case of 1997, in which a rogue Brooklyn cop shoved a broomstick up a Haitian immigrant's rectum, didn't stop the mayor's re-election that year (in the film, a staffer for Democratic candidate Ruth Messinger cites a New York *Post* editorial which stated that crime was down so much that a little police brutality was an acceptable price), the 1999 police killing of Amadou Diallo, an African immigrant shot 19 times because he pulled a wallet during a police stop, cracked Giuliani's invincibility. He dismissed the ensuing protests as "silly," which translated to many as callous and racist.

The other key racial-code issue of the era was welfare. Giuliani imposed a punitive mandatory-work policy, using welfare recipients to do laid-off city workers' old jobs for less than minimum wage while couching it in rhetoric about "ending dependency." The film juxtaposes black welfare recipients complaining that they need "real jobs" with footage of Giuliani welfare commissioner Jason Turner, who responds to a union leader's complaint about "slave labor" by declaring, "Work is what sets you free." (That's "Arbeit macht frei" in German, but Keating opts to cut to an old movie-comedy version of a 19th-century workhouse instead of to the more sinister inscription over the gates of Auschwitz.)

Was Giuliani a racist? Former city education commissioner Rudy Crew, one of the few black officials in his administration, says his support of school vouchers was racist, and calls the mayor's attitudes "deeply pathological" and "emotionally barren." And all three of Giuliani's mayoral races were racially polarized: He won more than two-thirds of the white vote and less than 20 percent of the black vote.

The film largely skips over two significant areas: Giuliani's policies on housing and protest suppression. The mayor expended a lot of venom on homeless people begging for quarters, but the landlords raising rents past \$1,000 a month were among his biggest supporters. He cut the city's housing-construction programs dramatically, and he discreetly supported the gutting of its rent controls. The city's housing crisis accelerated; today, homelessness is the highest it's been since the Depression, and nearly 29 percent of New York tenants spend more than half their income on rent.

Giuliani also pioneered many of the tactics against political protests that since 9/11 have

gone national: an overwhelming and overbearing police presence, pre-emptive arrests, and corralling demonstrators into cattle pens. (In one incident, he cut off subway service to central Harlem during a Black-ultranationalist rally.) His successor, the less puritanical but more plutocratic Michael Bloomberg, has amplified those policies, denying permits for large antiwar rallies and jailing almost 2,000 people during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

While the film begins and ends with images of Giuliani talking about the 9/11 attacks, it doesn't do much to dissect his image as a "hero" of 9/11 – the moment of his political resurrection, and perhaps the most overrated part of the Giuliani legacy. Maybe he looked courageous next to the scared rabbit staring at *My Pet Goat*, but his most concrete response to the attacks was trying to get the 2001 mayoral election postponed, on the grounds that only he could handle the crisis.

Giuliani Time posits itself as a warning in case the former Duce of Gotham runs for president. He may be too "liberal" for the Republicans' Taliban wing – he's spent more time schmoozing rich gay campaign donors than crusading against sodomite abominations – but if he does gain traction, be afraid.

And if immigration is a major issue in 2008, Giuliani has the perfect combination for a "compassionate conservative" ad campaign: photo-op Ellis Island roots and a record of abusing Haitians.

—STEVEN WISHNIA

A version of this article originally appeared in *In These Times*, www.inthesetimes.com.

Anarcho-Dystopia

MOUTH TO MOUTH

DIR. AND SCREENPLAY

BY ALISON MURRAY (2004)

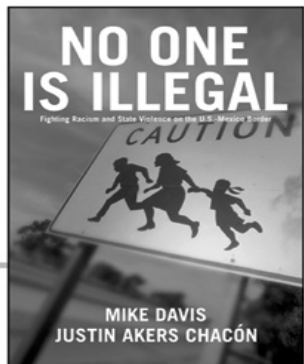
Partly reflecting director Alison Murray's own experience in London's anarchist squats, *Mouth to Mouth* is a roadtrip psycho-drama about the dystopia of cults. In the film, Sherry, a disillusioned teen, runs off from northern Europe to a rave and a commune in southern Europe with S.P.A.R.K. (Street People Armed with Radical Knowledge). The group's doses of methadone and self-help along with its rejection of mainstream paradigms attract young druggies, misfits and crazies. S.P.A.R.K.'s leader, Harry (always shirtless) molds the group by psychological sleights of hand to get members to accept his punishments and full control.

Beautifully shot with vivid colors, *Mouth to Mouth* nonetheless struggles with uneven transitions. It's left unclear for much of the movie why the protagonist, middle-class Sherry, is so mad at life – our only clues are her goth-hippie clothing. But Sherry's relationship to her mother is more fully explored towards the end, as the mother first tries to pry Sherry from Harry's grip and then later joins S.P.A.R.K. and bonds with her daughter.

The end scene is of Sherry and a love interest in a trippy dance routine that clashes with the intensity of prior scenes. Apart from a few glitches in the script, the movie succeeds in capturing the lure of cults and the seedier side of counter-culture. *Mouth to Mouth* is as much a cautionary tale against charismatic authoritarianism as an indictment of radical lifestyle politics.

—BENNETT BAUMER

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No One Is Illegal debunks the leading ideas behind the often-violent right-wing backlash against immigrants by putting a human face on the immigrants who risk their lives crossing the border to work in the United States.

MIKE DAVIS AND JUSTIN AKERS CHACÓN

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From *No One is Illegal*

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Why Puerto Ricans Are So Damn Proud

YO SOY BORICUA PA' QUE TU LO SEPAS! (I'M PUERTO RICAN, JUST SO YOU KNOW!)
DIRECTED BY ROSIE PEREZ (2006)

Taken from a well-known chant that is shouted during the Puerto Rican Day Parade by crowds of people parading up the streets of Fifth Avenue, *Yo Soy Boricua Pa' Que Tu Lo Sepas*, documents the history, culture and struggles of Puerto Ricans on the island and in New York City. The film, which recently appeared at the Tribeca Film Festival, marks actress Rosie Perez's debut as a director and comes just in time for this year's June 11 Puerto Rican Day Parade.

The documentary interweaves the stories of Brooklyn-born Rosie, her family and other Puerto Ricans from New York City. At the heart of the film, Rosie seeks to explore the unavoidable question, "Why are Puerto Ricans so Proud?"

While the film concentrates on some of the most important events, politics and figures in Puerto Rican history, such as the conquest of the Taino Indians, the original inhabitants, the life of early 20th century independence leader Pedro Albizu Campos, and the U.S. occupation of Vieques, one can also learn about Spanglish, the significance of Casitas, and what are Cuchifritos.

In a very natural sense, the film is filled with humorous moments, vivid images of flying flags during the Puerto Rican Day

parade and footage of Rosie as she travels to her ancestral home of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

This documentary is a great introduction to Puerto Rican culture and history for those unfamiliar with it. The film will air on the Independent Film Channel on June 12 and will be screened at the University of Puerto Rico during the coming weeks.

Copies of the film will be provided to teachers upon request to IFC Television, www.ifctv.com

—SIERRA FREEMAN



Rosie Perez. PHOTO: LMNOP.ORG

books

Call of the Right

KINGDOM COMING: THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM
NORTON, 2006

Salon reporter Michelle Goldberg's new book *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* is a timely expose detailing the growth and prevalence of what she calls "Christian Nationalism" in government and society.

Goldberg shows how the Christian right has become a powerful force with taxpayer money by securing "hundreds of millions of dollars in government grants for itself, thanks to Bush's Faith-Based Initiative." Arguing that "a populist movement needs an enemy," she hones in on how "homosexuality has become the mobilizing passion for much of the religious right."

Goldberg recently visited a journalism class at the New School and discussed the cult-like qualities of the Christian right, how it operates and is trying to reshape the whole nation through "dominion theology." Goldberg comes to the issue through investigative reporting on the "ex-gay" movement, which argues that homosexuality is a choice (or a mental illness), and therefore can be altered. She traveled around the United States to give an inside account of the Christian right's base in megachurches, schools and exurbs.

She attended an ex-gay convention in Los Angeles and profiled a group of gay men liv-



GARY MARTIN

ing in a Northern California "rehab" center that promised to "cure" them. While warning of the religious right's agenda to dominate politics, society and culture completely, Goldberg expressed some sympathy for their foot soldiers. "My heart opened up for these people. They lack security and family values. All they want is a safety net."

The book reveals how adherents of the dominion theology think they have the right to rule nonbelievers. Gays, urbanites, foreigners, intellectuals and religious minorities are all a threat to this totalitarian populist movement. "This doesn't mean," says Goldberg, "that nonbelievers will be forced to convert. They'll just have to learn their place."

Goldberg also underscores the hypocrisy of the Bush Administration, pointing out, "It makes no sense to fight religious authoritarianism abroad while letting it take over at home."

Michelle Goldberg will be reading from *Kingdom Coming* on May 22 at The Half King at 505 W. 23rd St.

—MICHAEL SHANE MANIERI

THE FILMS OF JEAN-MARIE TENO

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MAY 22—30

"I am very much attached to the whole global situation, to see how we can have an impact and really foster change so that people can live better." —JEAN-MARIE TENO

This selection of African films highlights the work of acclaimed Cameroonian film essayist Jean-Marie Teno. Teno's lyrical explorations of post-colonial Cameroon reveal a country where dissent is severely punished and civil rights are dismantled in the name of democracy. Films include Teno's *Africa*, *I Will Fleece You*; *Chief!*; *Clando*; and *The Colonial Misunderstanding*.

The series also features the Best of the African Film Festival and the Brooklyn premiere of *Delwende*, a film about the human costs of traditional cultural practices and the sexist manipulation of women in Burkina Faso.

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“Giuliani Time reminded us of the pre-9/11 days when New York was ruled by a vengeful deity.” - NY Magazine

“Nothing less than a full frontal assault on the civic deification of Rudolph W. Giuliani.” - New York Times

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